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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, May 28, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "STRAWBERRIES - RAW AND PRESERVED." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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The strawberry is one of America's best known and most generally liked fruits. Even two centuries ago, before all our fancy varieties had been developed, a famous doctor gave it high praise. He remarked that God could have made a berry that was better than the strawberry, but He never did!

This doctor undoubtedly thought of the strawberry just as something delicious to eat. But dietitians of today think of it in terms of vitamin C. The raw strawberry is one of our rich sources of this important vitamin, ranking alongside the orange.

Of course you want to handle your strawberries in such a way that when they come to the table they will have as much of their original flavor and food value as possible.

Sometimes there's loss both of food value and of flavor because of improper washing. I've seen women put their strawberries into a pan and then hold the pan under the faucet and turn the cold water on full blast. Fairly pounded the strawberries. Well strawberries are too delicate a fruit to stand such rough treatment. Give them a dip instead of a shower bath. And in washing them don't pour off the water. That way much of the dirt stays in the pan with the berries. As most of you know, the best way to wash strawberries, is to put them into the water, then lift them out into another container of water with your fingers somewhat spread apart to act as a strainer. Two such rinses are usually enough.

Another point about preparation of strawberries for the table is to leave the leafy cap on until after the washing. If you like your strawberries served with a little cone of powdered sugar, the caps can stay on clear up to the moment of being eaten. Yes, I'll admit that dirt sometimes clings underneath those caps. But one additional rinse is better than de-capping before washing. You lose less color and flavor that way.

I imagine you all drain your strawberries after you wash them. That is important whether you plan to eat them raw or to cook them. If you are eating them raw you don't want to have to pick them out of a pool of pinkish water. And if you are making them into preserves, you don't want any excess of water to weigh with the fruit. A colander is a handy utensil to drain strawberries in.

The worst sin of all against the strawberry is to let it stand in water. That way the color and flavor leaches right out.

If you want to sweeten strawberries before you serve them raw, it's a good idea to cut them in halves or chop them. Don't crush the strawberries. Crushed berries haven't the lovely brilliant color of chopped ones.

Each of you probably has her own pet strawberry recipe. And I'm going to tell you one of my favorites - a fresh strawberry pie that fairly melts in your mouth. So snatch up a pencil and a scrap of paper to write down the instructions. For I know that you are going to want to try out this recipe if you've never happened to run across it before. As far as that goes, the method is simple. I suppose you really wouldn't have to write it down.

Well, here's the recipe: Fill a flaky already baked pie crust or some tart shells with fine big strawberries. Then make a sauce from small berries. Cook these small berries and then strain them through cheesecloth. Sweeten this juice, and then thicken it a little with cornstarch. Don't use flour for thickening, as flour would mean a cloudy sauce. Then add a little butter to give a brilliant, glazed look to the sauce. Pour that sauce over the big berries in the pie - not too much of it. Just enough so that the strawberries stand out like islands in a sea of brilliant red. In this pie you have the big strawberries uncooked so that there is no loss of vitamin C. And the small berries are cooked a short enough time that some vitamin C may remain.

And for your strawberry surplus, there are preserves and jam. Specialists in the Bureau of Home Economics in Washington advise housekeepers not to try to put up too much at a time. Six to 8 pounds are about the most you can handle satisfactory.

Heat is the worst enemy of color and flavor in strawberries. Therefore the approved methods of preserving use the minimum of cooking time. One of the preserving methods suggested by these home economists combines the strawberries with an equal weight of sugar and lets the berries stand in the sugar 8 to 10 hours. Then the sugar draws a good deal of the liquid out of the berries and somewhat strengthens the tissues of the berries. That means that you do not add water to the berries when you start them cooking. Which in turn means that cooking time is shortened because there isn't so much moisture to be evaporated. And that in turn means a saving of color and flavor. It's a veritable House-That-Jack-Built tie-up. After letting the strawberries stand those 8 hours in sugar, boil them rapidly 15 minutes or so, or until the sirup is rather thick. You'll have to stir it once in a while, but do the stirring carefully so as not to break up the berries.

If you'd like to make a different strawberry jam, you might try strawberries with an equal amount of rhubarb. Or try a jam of 2 parts strawberries to 1 part fresh pineapple, boiling the pineapple and its equal weight of sugar 10 minutes before adding the strawberries and their quota of sugar.

Well, time's up! All we've been able to do is to say that fresh strawberries are a fine source of vitamin C, and that they should be washed carefully and before the cap is removed, and finally to give a few strawberry recipes!

